



Lessons Beyond the Scoreboard

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As I was driving home from one of my kid's sporting events recently, I thought about what they were really learning from all these camps, practices, games, and tournaments. Beyond physical skills, the X's & O's, and the wins and losses, are all the registration fees, driving, and scheduling juggling really worth it? Here are three stories from our family that make me think it is worth every penny.

One of my daughters was recently playing in a golf meet. She was playing the best round of her life and contending for medalist honors. With three holes left she had a makeable par putt. At worst, it should have been a bogey. But she ended up four-putting for a triple bogey! I held in my emotions and when she looked at me, she just gave me her best shrug emoji impression and moved on to the next tee box. At her age, if I had four-putted there, I would have probably thrown my putter into the woods. Her reaction to the four-putt is partly her natural demeanor, but also the activities she has participated in has helped her develop an ability to shake things off and move on to the next task. Certainly, this ability to not dwell on the negative or let her emotions get the best of her will be valuable in school and work in her future.

Another daughter was on a team that participated in a very challenging tournament with some really high-level teams. It was clear early on in their first contest that this team was out of their league in this tournament and that the rest of the games were going to be a struggle. It would have been understandable for the team to get mad about their lack of competitiveness or sad about their prospect of a weekend of getting crushed by their opponents. But I was really impressed by how the team responded to the challenge and fought hard until the last match was over. Now, they didn't end up winning any games, but the lesson that my daughter took away from the weekend was how to respond when the odds are against you. She played hard until the very end and knew the only things she could control were her effort and attitude. There are few scenarios where kids today can be put into challenging, but controlled, situations that could be embarrassing or frustrating at the moment, but provide them with teachable moments for the rest of their lives.

I think most families probably have a love/hate relationship with youth sports tryouts. Our family has certainly experienced all of the highs and lows of the tryout process. When our kids made the team they wanted, it has always been great to celebrate being recognized for their hard work. But, we have also found positives that come from not making the desired team. Yes, the initial moments of decision that come with feelings of hurt, dejection, and fear of missing out, are brutal. But those emotions pass and what is left is a better perspective on what is appropriate at that moment for our young athlete and our family. It's very similar to not getting the job you really wanted. Sometimes, it can be a blessing in disguise and you realize the job (or team) isn't what you had perceived it to be and maybe wasn't the best fit for you at the moment.

The stated goals of any youth sports team or activity probably isn't career and life training, but I strongly believe all the experiences that our children are having in youth sports can provide them with valuable lessons and skills for their lives ahead of them.